

**NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE**  
**SOUTHEAST REGION**  
**NEWS RELEASE**

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**NOAA FINES TWO TEXAS FISHERMEN \$439,000 AND  
IMPOSES NEW SANCTIONS AGAINST THEM**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has charged the owner and operators of two fishing vessels with significant violations of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Lacey Act, and the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act for fishing while they were prohibited from doing so.

NOAA has assessed a penalty of \$235,000 and a permit sanction of 105 days against the fishing vessel Northern Star, and a penalty of \$204,000 and a permit sanction of 170 days against the fishing vessel Sao Mai. The Northern Star, owned by Cuong Vo and operated by his brother Duong Vo, both of Houston, allegedly made numerous fishing trips between April and September 1999, harvesting yellowfin tuna and swordfish, while their federal fishing permits were sanctioned. In addition, the Northern Star made 10 fishing trips into Mexican waters without a Mexican permit and Cuong Vo filed a falsified bluefin tuna landing report with the National Marine Fisheries Service. The Sao Mai, also owned and operated by Cuong Vo, allegedly made 17 fishing trips between March and September 1999, harvesting primarily red snapper, vermilion snapper, and mackerel.

“These fishermen's permits were suspended because they violated our nation’s fisheries laws. However, they continued to fish despite the suspensions. Such violations undermine the entire permitting system and cannot be tolerated,” said NOAA enforcement attorney Robin Jung.

The Northern Star’s permit was originally suspended because Cuong Vo did not pay a fine levied by an administrative law judge for fisheries violations in December 1998. The Sao Mai’s permit was suspended because Cuong and Duong Vo failed to honor the terms of a settlement agreement they entered into with NOAA in 1998.

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These cases originated when NOAA Office for Law Enforcement personnel discovered on September 21, 1999 that the Northern Star was docked in Galveston, Texas offloading fish. NOAA officers boarded the Northern Star and conducted an investigation that revealed both vessels had been fishing illegally for the previous seven months.

NOAA Fisheries urges citizens to report fishery violations during weekly business hours of 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. EDT, to its Southeast Region Law Enforcement Division at (727) 570-5344, or after hours and weekends at its National Enforcement Hotline at (800) 853-1964.

This and other Southeast Regional news releases and fishery bulletins are available on the region's Internet home page: <http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov> or NOAA's Internet home page, <http://www.noaa.gov/public-affairs/press99.html>.

NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The agency conducts scientific research and provides services and products to support fisheries management, fisheries development, trade and industry assistance, enforcement, and protected species and habitat conservation programs.

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